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California Department of Social Services Efforts to Enhance Access to the CalFresh Program

CalFresh Program Rebranding Effort

In October of 2010, the CDSS renamed the Food Stamp Program in California to CalFresh. The name change was needed for a variety of reasons: 1) the state's nutrition assistance program is no longer delivered by stamps; 2) the program supports healthy living; 3) it is important to agriculture in California; and 4) it is better viewed as a health and nutrition program rather than a welfare program. The new name eliminates some of the stigma associated with Food Stamps and provides a great opportunity for outreach to potentially eligible families through marketing campaigns supporting the CalFresh program.

Modified Categorical Eligibility

AB 433 established a new eligibility standard for CalFresh. The enactment of AB 433 led to the development of a Modified Categorical Eligibility (MCE) policy which would exempt households from being subject to the resource limits for CalFresh eligibility. MCE was implemented effective July 1, 2009 for ongoing households and no later than January 1, 2010 for applicants. To be determined for MCE, non-assistance households had to contain a minor child. An expansion of MCE was included in the Governor's Budget for 2010-11. The expansion which was effective February 1, 2011, included elderly/disabled households as well as all other households that don't contain a minor child as was required with the initial implementation of MCE. With the expansion of MCE, a total of approximately 189,000 additional households are projected to be CalFresh eligible due to AB 433.

Food Stamp Program Restoration Waiver

In 2009, CDSS requested and received approval of a federal waiver to allow restoration of food assistance benefits for recipients whose benefits have been terminated for failing to submit paperwork, for example. Restoration of benefits will be automatic if a family is able to comply with program requirements within one month of termination of benefits and the full re-application process is avoided.

Face-to-Face Interviews Waiver

In 2009, CDSS requested and received approval of a federal waiver allowing county welfare departments the option of waiving the face-to-face interview for all CalFresh recipients. The interview can instead be conducted by telephone and the fingerprint imaging requirement can be postponed for up to a year. CDSS issued county implementing instructions in October 2009. The waiver is effective as of June 1, 2009 through May 31, 2013.

Foster Youth Eligibility

In 2009, counties received implementing instructions from CDSS to develop a process ensuring that foster youth are given the opportunity to apply for food stamps prior to “aging out” of the foster care system. In addition, CDSS submitted on March 1, 2010 a demonstration project request to the federal Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to provide foster youth with food assistance benefits without regard to income or resources for one year after they “age out.” We are working with FNS to obtain approval.

CalFresh Access and Improvement Project

This project involves a collaborative effort with the California Department of Public Health to reach underserved communities through a number of community organizations in 43 counties that might qualify for CalFresh and help them apply. Since 2009, funding has more than doubled from \$6 million to \$13 million, and the number of contractors has almost more than doubled from 52 to 82. The major partners in this effort are the California Association of Food Banks and the Central Valley Health Network.

USDA Western Region Roundtables

In partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture, CDSS held a series of roundtable meetings in 2008 to further implement a strategic planning process to increase CalFresh participation in targeted counties. The meetings have been held in Fresno, Los Angeles, San Diego and Tulare.

Restaurant Meals Allowance Program Expansion

California is one of only four states in the nation that provides counties the option to operate a Restaurant Meals Program for homeless, elderly, and disabled CalFresh recipients who may not have easy access to cooking facilities. Five counties, accounting for 42 percent of caseload, have implemented this option.

ARRA Modernization Projects

California received more than \$22 million in administrative funding over a two year period for the CalFresh program from the federal FNS under the Economic Stimulus package for additional administrative efficiencies and enhancements for the CalFresh program. Funding was used for an expansion/creation of on-line applications in all three automation systems as well as installation of document imaging capability in one automation system and Interactive Voice Response systems in the other two automation systems. These automation enhancements benefit recipients and county welfare departments by expediting the application process and provide quicker handling on CalFresh cases.